

Darlington

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Comment text:

Related subject: Borough-wide

Following extensive consultation with members of the public and local representatives with have put together a document outlining our views on the proposed ward boundaries. While we are happy with most, we have suggested a few alternative proposals which we believe would help the boundary commission in its goal of providing proper and effective local government representation which aligns with existing community boundaries and ties.

Attached Documents:

- darlington-conservatives-boundary-review-second-consultation-proposals.docx

Darlington Conservative Party Response to the Draft Proposals for Local Government Boundary Changes

Following a detailed examination of the Local Government Boundary Commission's draft proposals for electoral arrangements in Darlington, and extensive consultation with local residents and elected representatives, we have prepared the following report outlining our views on the proposed ward boundaries.

In addition to commenting on the Commission's draft recommendations, we have submitted a series of suggested alternative ward boundaries. These proposals have been developed in response to feedback received during our consultation process and seek to better reflect established community identities, shared local facilities, recognisable physical boundaries and the views expressed by residents and elected officials across the borough.

We respectfully ask the Commission to consider both the evidence contained within this report and the accompanying alternative ward maps when reaching its final recommendations.

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Mowden:

We are pleased to see that the Commission intends to keep the current Mowden ward together. Breaking up the ward would divide a distinct suburban community with its own identity, shared facilities and established community links. However, we do have concerns regarding some of the proposed additions to the ward.

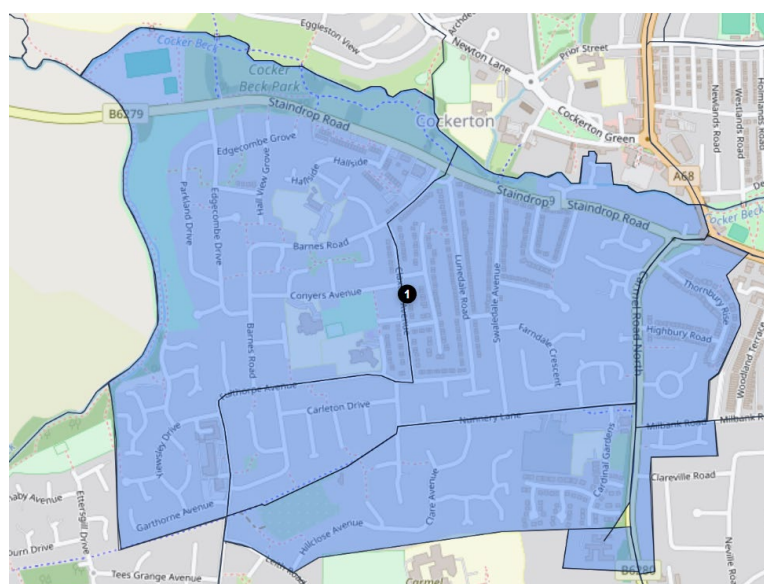
In its report, the Commission outlines its intention to use the grounds of Carmel College as a natural boundary between communities, resulting in the transfer of Cardinal Gardens and part of Nunnery Lane into the proposed Mowden ward. If Carmel College is considered an appropriate natural boundary, we believe the same principle should also apply to Broadmeadows, Hillclose Avenue and Clare Avenue, both of which lie to the north of the college grounds. Including these streets within the proposed Mowden ward would create a more consistent and logical boundary.

We are also concerned about the proposal to transfer almost the entirety of polling district COC into the new Mowden ward. While we can understand the rationale for including streets such as Thornbury Rise, given their close proximity and links to other areas off Carmel Road North that are already associated with Mowden, we believe that extending the boundary to include parts of Woodlands Road, together with Pierremont Crescent, Pierremont Gardens and Woodlands Terrace, would divide an established community.

Although these streets are not currently within the Mowden electoral ward, they are closely associated with the Pierremont area. Residents share strong historic and contemporary links with the wider Pierremont community and rely on many of the same local facilities and services, including GP surgeries, schools, parks and public transport connections. The nearest bus services for many residents are located on Woodlands Road within the existing Pierremont area, further reinforcing these community links.

We therefore ask the Commission to reconsider the proposed boundaries and explore including Pierremont Crescent, Pierremont Gardens, the relevant section of Woodlands Road and Woodlands Terrace within the proposed Pierremont ward. At the same time, we would encourage the inclusion of Broadmeadows, Hillclose Avenue and Clare Avenue within the proposed Mowden ward in order to better reflect community identity and create boundaries that follow clear and recognisable physical features.

We believe these changes would provide a more accurate reflection of established communities and support the Commission's objective of creating effective and convenient local government arrangements.



Blackwell & Hummersknott

We are disappointed by the current draft proposals for the Blackwell and Hummersknott area.

In its initial report, the Commission referred to a submission stating that "Park West has no clear community centre, shared facilities or clear identity." We strongly disagree with this assessment and, from the responses we have received from local residents, believe the Commission will already have heard substantial evidence to the contrary.

Blackwell, which forms the majority of the current Park West ward, has existed for over 1,000 years. Originally an Anglo-Saxon village separate from Darlington, it maintained its own distinct identity as the town gradually expanded around it. Today, Blackwell remains a recognisable and cohesive community centred on the historic village and the facilities that serve local residents.

Residents rely upon a range of shared institutions and amenities that contribute to a strong sense of community identity. These include Blackwell Post Office, New Blackwell Lawn Tennis Club, All Saints' Church Blackwell and Blackwell Meadows Rugby Football Club. Together, these facilities provide clear evidence of a shared local identity and community focus.

The current draft proposals do not appear to fully reflect Blackwell's identity as a distinct suburb of Darlington. We also believe Blackwell has stronger community ties with Hummersknott than the proposals recognise.

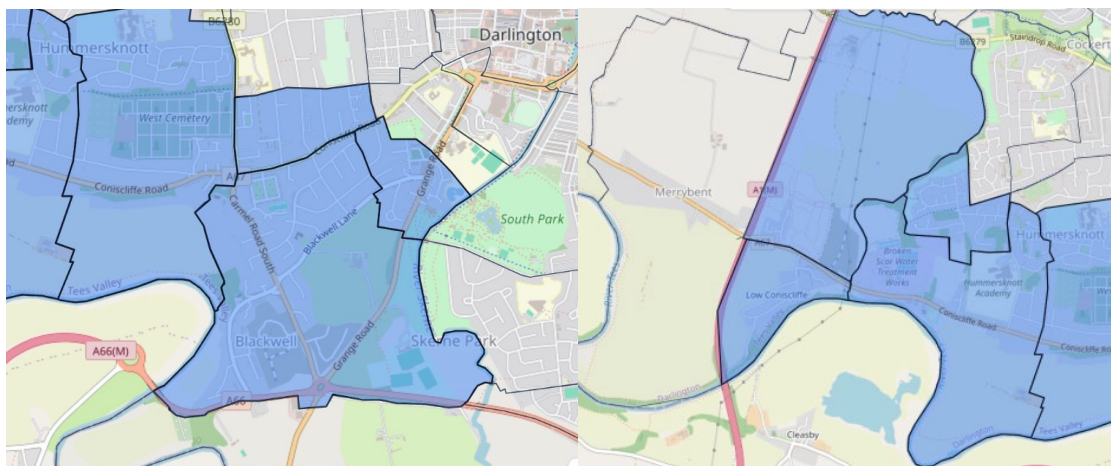
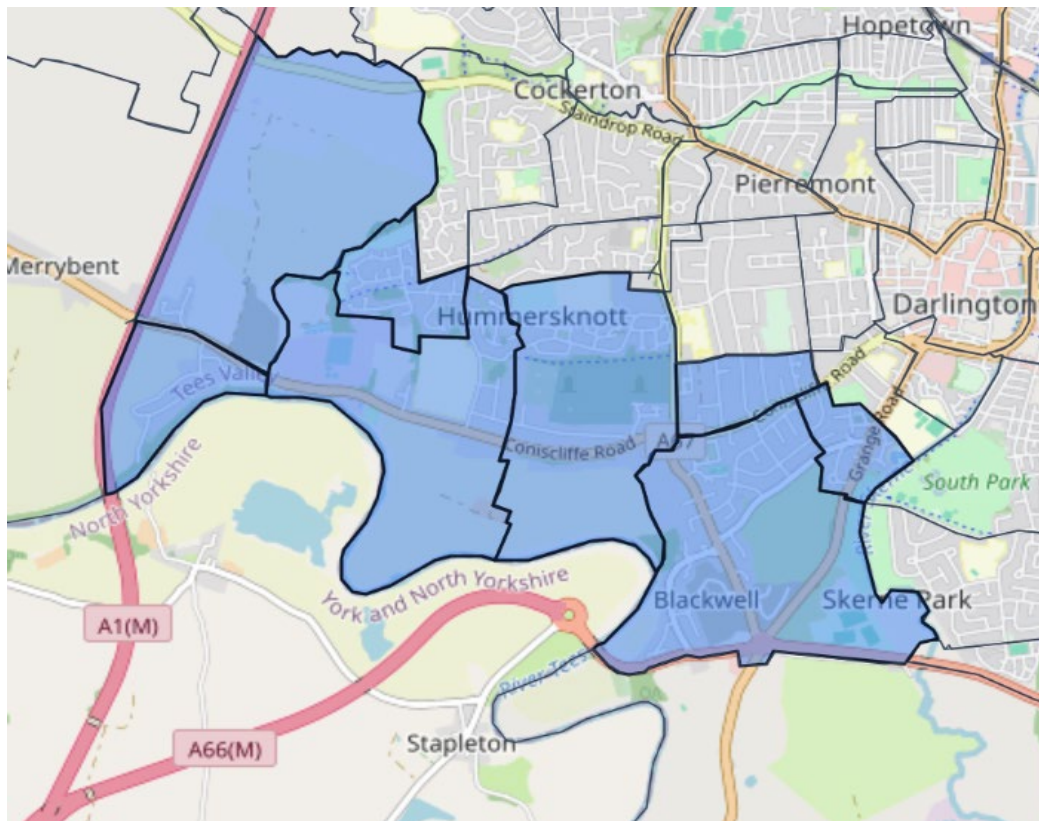
The two communities share important green spaces, including the Broken Scar Riverside Walk and the areas surrounding West Cemetery. In addition, many primary schools serving Blackwell have established links with Hummersknott Academy and Carmel College, both of which serve families from across these neighbouring communities.

Transport links further reinforce these connections. Coniscliffe Road provides a direct route between Blackwell and Hummersknott, while local bus services connect residents to shared facilities and to Darlington town centre. These links help create a natural community that extends across the current Park West and Hummersknott wards.

Many residents of Hummersknott also make regular use of the facilities and services located in Blackwell. We therefore believe electoral boundaries should better reflect the close relationship between these neighbouring communities.

At the same time, we believe that communities around Southend Avenue and Polam Lane, which are currently within the Park West ward, may have stronger links with the town centre and College areas due to their proximity, shared services and common concerns. Consideration should therefore be given to whether these neighbourhoods would be more appropriately grouped within a ward focused on the town centre and surrounding communities.

For these reasons, we urge the Commission to reconsider its assessment of Blackwell and Hummersknott. Blackwell possesses a clear historical identity, established community facilities and strong links both within the community itself and with neighbouring Hummersknott. Any revised boundary arrangements should recognise and reflect these longstanding community ties while ensuring effective and convenient local government representation.



Hurworth

Following consultation of local elected representatives and residents we are supporting the boundary commissions proposed boundaries for Hurworth & Neasham

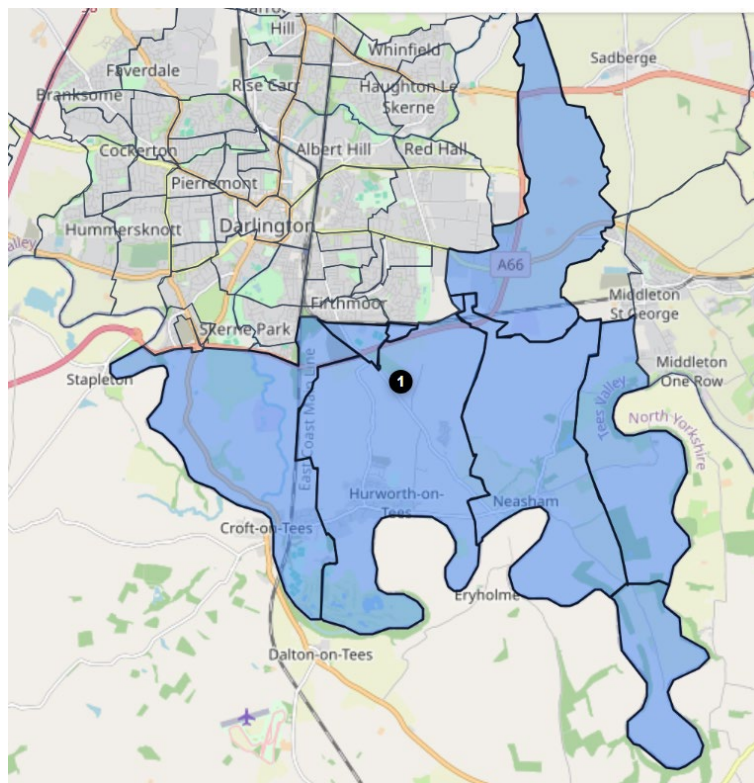
We believe the proposed boundaries accurately reflect existing community identities while also taking into account current and future housing growth within Hurworth itself and on the edge of Darlington.

We support the decision to include the entirety of Hurworth Meadows within the proposed ward is right to both better fix existing community boundaries and given the ward an appropriate number of electors to remain a single two-member ward covering the connected communities of Hurworth Place, Hurworth, Neasham and Hurworth Meadows.

These communities share strong social, historical and geographical connections. Residents make use of the same local facilities, services and transport links, and many community activities and organisations serve people from across the area. Keeping these communities together within a single ward will help preserve established community relationships and provide clear and effective local representation.

The proposed ward also reflects the rural and village character shared by these communities. Maintaining this identity within a single ward will help ensure that local councillors can effectively represent the interests and priorities that are common across the area.

Overall, we believe the draft proposals strike an appropriate balance between electoral equality and community identity, and we encourage the Commission to retain the proposed Hurworth ward in its final recommendations.



Middleton St George & Sadberge

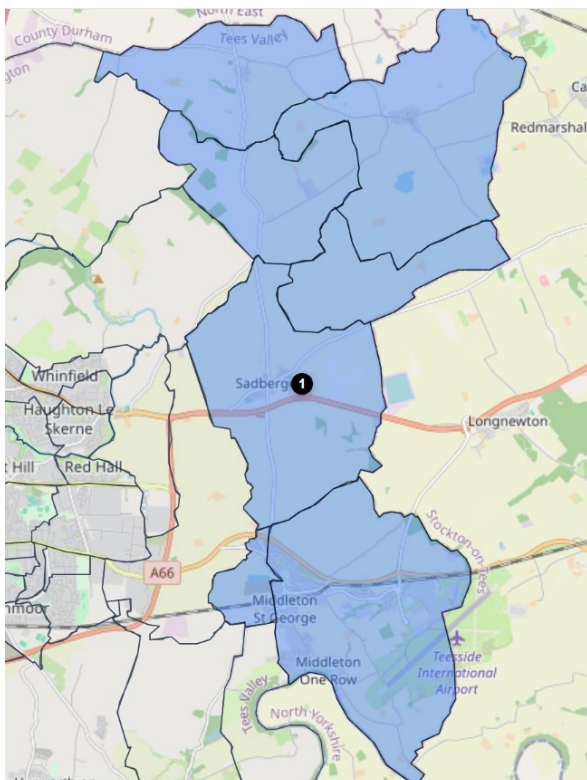
We welcome the Commission's draft proposals for the proposed Middleton St George and Sadberge ward and believe they provide a sensible balance between reflecting existing community identities and accommodating future housing growth across the borough.

Like the proposals for the new Hurworth ward, we are pleased to see that the proposed boundaries preserve established community ties while also taking into consideration major future housing developments on the edge of Darlington, including the planned Skerningham development within the parish of Barmpton.

The proposed transfer of Barmpton into the Whinfield and Haughton ward reflects the likely future community links that will emerge as the development progresses. The new housing areas on the northern edge of Darlington will have no direct physical road connection to Middleton St George, Sadberge or the surrounding rural villages without first passing through other wards. Instead, residents of these developments are likely to have much stronger day-to-day links with Whinfield and other communities in the north-east of Darlington through transport routes, local services, schools and community facilities.

We are also pleased that the proposals allow the existing rural communities of Middleton St George, Sadberge and the surrounding villages to remain together within a single three-member ward. These communities share common rural characteristics, local priorities and longstanding social connections. Retaining them within one ward will help preserve these established ties while ensuring effective and convenient local government representation.

Overall, we believe the draft proposals successfully reflect both existing community identities and future patterns of development. We therefore encourage the Commission to retain the proposed arrangements in its final recommendations.



Pierremont

Following extensive consultation with local residents, we have concerns that neither the current nor the proposed ward boundaries for Pierremont accurately reflect the established community ties within the area.

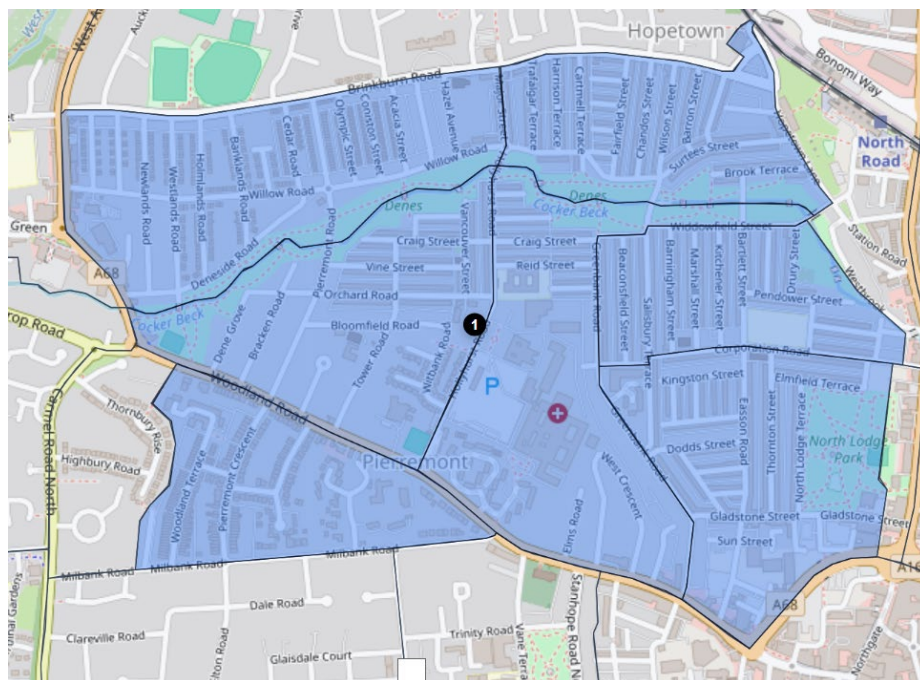
Both the existing and proposed boundaries divide the wider Pierremont community along Woodlands Road, without fully taking into account the strong links shared by residents of Pierremont Crescent, Pierremont Gardens and Woodlands Terrace with the surrounding Pierremont area.

Residents in these streets rely upon many of the same local services, facilities and green spaces as those living within the proposed Pierremont ward. For example, residents travelling into Darlington town centre typically use the bus stop named "Pierremont Crescent" on Woodlands Road, which is located within the Pierremont Ward. This reflects the natural travel patterns and day-to-day connections that residents have with the wider Pierremont community.

The area also shares close links with a number of important local amenities and community facilities, including the Denes, Pierremont Pre-School, Willow Road GP Surgery and Woodlands Bowling Club. These facilities are all located in very close proximity to Pierremont Crescent, Pierremont Gardens and Woodlands Terrace and form part of the community infrastructure that residents regularly use. However, under both the current and proposed arrangements, these facilities would be located in a different ward from many of the residents who rely upon them.

We therefore believe that the proposed boundaries do not fully reflect the established community identity of this area. Consideration should be given to including Pierremont Crescent, Pierremont Gardens and Woodlands Terrace within the Pierremont ward in order to better align electoral boundaries with the communities, services and facilities that residents identify with and use on a daily basis.

Such a change would provide a more accurate reflection of local community ties and support the Commission's objective of creating boundaries that reflect established communities and facilitate effective local government representation.



College & Town Centre Ward

As previously stated, we do not believe that either the current or proposed boundaries for the Blackwell and College areas accurately reflect established community identities and local connections. Blackwell is a distinct outer-town suburb of Darlington with stronger links to neighbouring suburban communities such as Hummersknott than the draft proposals recognise. At the same time, we believe the role and identity of Darlington town centre has been largely overlooked within the proposed warding arrangements.

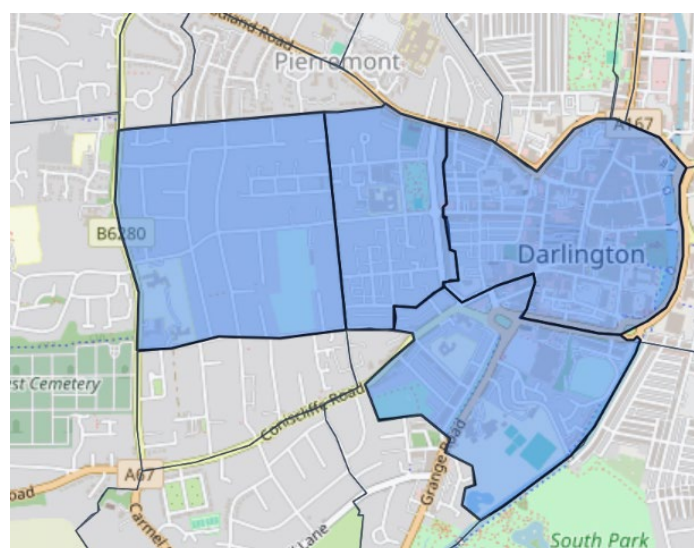
During our consultation, many local business owners highlighted the importance of effective local representation, particularly given the challenging economic conditions currently facing high street businesses. While electoral arrangements must balance a range of factors, it is important that town centre businesses and residents are represented within wards that reflect their shared interests and the unique challenges associated with the town centre environment.

We believe our proposed boundaries better reflect the community ties that exist between the town centre and surrounding residential areas, particularly those around Abbey Road and Duke Street. These communities share strong links through proximity, travel patterns, local services and common concerns. Residents and businesses across this area experience similar issues, including parking pressures, traffic congestion during peak shopping periods and the wider economic vitality of the town centre.

Our proposals also include areas currently within the Park West ward around Southend Avenue. These neighbourhoods are located in close proximity to the town centre and share many of the same concerns and characteristics as other communities surrounding the central area. Their inclusion within a town-centred ward would therefore better reflect existing community relationships.

In addition, some parts of the current Park West ward, including Greener Drive and South Terrace, have stronger physical and practical connections to the town centre than to other parts of the ward. In many cases, travel by road between these areas and the wider ward requires passing through Victoria Road and the town centre itself. This demonstrates the extent to which these neighbourhoods are integrated with the town centre and surrounding communities. Separating them into different wards would fail to reflect these established links and patterns of movement.

For these reasons, we believe revised ward boundaries should place greater emphasis on the relationship between the town centre and its surrounding residential communities, while also recognising the strong connections between Blackwell and neighbouring suburban areas such as Hummersknott. Such an approach would better reflect community identity and support effective and convenient local government representation.



Hundens Lane & Lingfield Ward

As set out in our original submission regarding the Hundens Lane and Lingfield area, we continue to believe that Tornado Way represents the most appropriate and recognisable boundary between two distinct communities and should therefore be used as the ward boundary.

We appreciate that members of the Commission visited the area as part of their review of Darlington's electoral arrangements. However, following extensive consultation with local residents, we remain of the view that Tornado Way forms a clear physical and community boundary that should be reflected in the final proposals.

There is a significant degree of consensus on this issue. All six sets of proposals submitted by political groups identified Tornado Way as the most appropriate boundary between these communities. This reflects both the physical characteristics of the area and the way in which residents identify with their neighbourhoods.

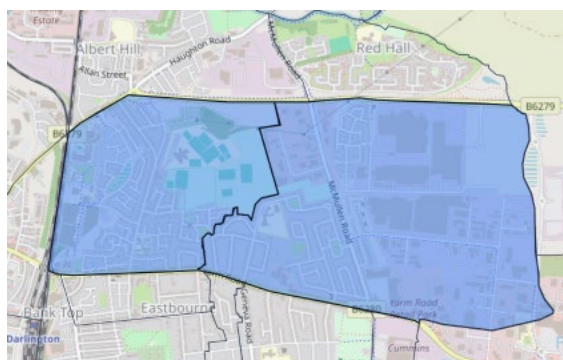
In its draft recommendations, the Commission identified roads such as Carmel Road South as natural boundaries between communities. However, Tornado Way provides an even stronger physical division. Along its approximately one-and-a-half-mile stretch from Houghton Road Roundabout to beyond Red Hall, there are only two pedestrian crossing points. This creates a substantial barrier between communities on either side and limits day-to-day interaction across the route.

Hundens Lane and Lingfield share strong community links and possess a distinct identity that differs from neighbouring areas such as Red Hall and Albert Hill. The two communities are connected by residential routes including Yarm Road and Lapwing Drive and share a range of facilities, services and amenities. These include Eastbourne Sports Complex, Hundens Lane Day Hospital and Heathfield Primary School, all of which serve residents from across the Hundens Lane and Lingfield area and help reinforce a shared sense of community.

This community relationship is also recognised by other public service organisations. For example, local neighbourhood policing arrangements group Hundens Lane and Lingfield together within the same neighbourhood policing area, while using Tornado Way as a boundary between neighbourhood teams. Red Hall and Albert Hill are not included within the same policing area, providing further evidence that public services already recognise Tornado Way as a natural division between distinct communities.

By contrast, Tornado Way separates Hundens Lane and Lingfield from Red Hall and Albert Hill, which have their own identities, facilities and local connections. We therefore believe that using Tornado Way as the ward boundary would better reflect existing community ties and create a clearer and more easily understood electoral arrangement.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask the Commission to revisit its draft proposals and give further consideration to the strong consensus among residents, community stakeholders and political groups that Tornado Way should form the boundary between these communities. We believe this approach would better reflect community identity and provide a more logical and recognisable ward structure while supporting effective and convenient local government.



Albert Hill & Red Hall

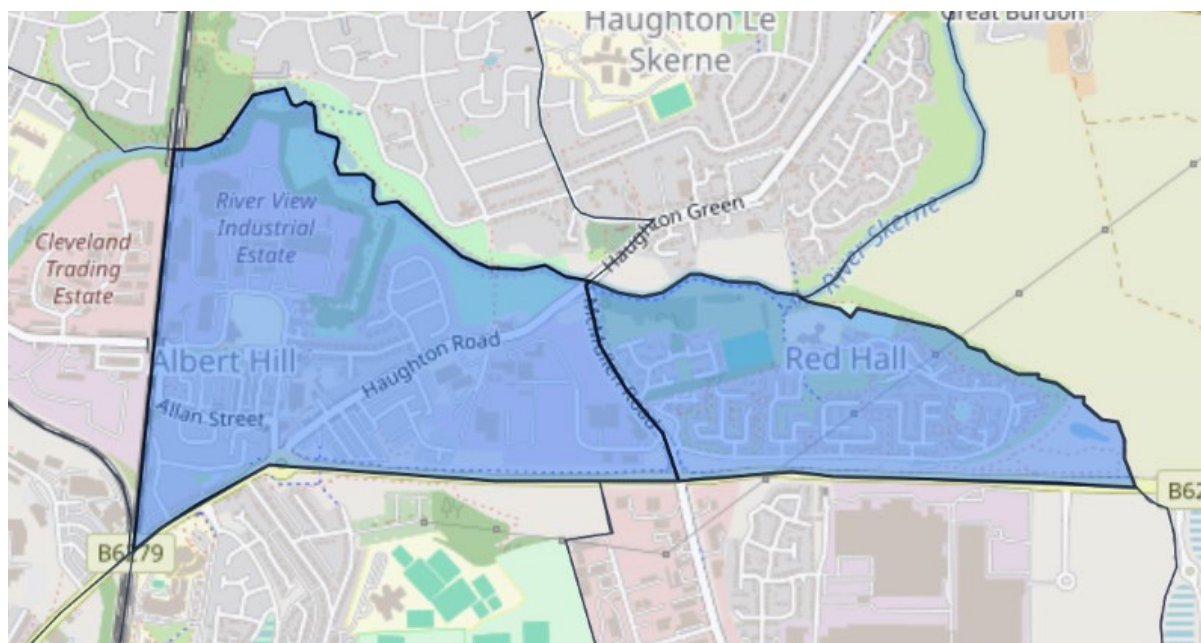
As previously stated, we believe that Tornado Way should be used as the boundary between Albert Hill and Red Hall on one side and Hundens Lane and Lingfield on the other. Tornado Way represents a clear and recognisable physical barrier, being a wide 40mph road with only two pedestrian crossing points along a stretch of approximately one and a half miles. As such, it forms a far stronger division between communities than many of the roads that have been accepted elsewhere in the draft proposals as natural boundaries.

Red Hall and Albert Hill possess a distinct community identity that is separate from that of Hundens Lane and Lingfield. Residents primarily rely upon different local facilities, amenities and community assets, including Red Hall Primary School, Gurney Pease Academy, Red Hall Community Centre, Albert Hill Play Park and Red Hall Play Area. These facilities serve as important focal points for local residents and help reinforce a shared sense of identity within the Red Hall and Albert Hill communities.

Red Hall and Albert Hill also have stronger connections with each other than with neighbouring communities south of Tornado Way. The two areas share access to green spaces along the River Skerne corridor and often experience similar local issues and priorities, including concerns relating to anti-social behaviour, off-road motorcycles and environmental maintenance. These shared challenges further contribute to a common community identity and create a natural basis for representation within the same ward.

By contrast, Hundens Lane and Lingfield have their own distinct community networks, facilities and local connections. We therefore believe that combining these areas within the same ward would fail to reflect established community identities and patterns of daily life.

For these reasons, we urge the Commission to reconsider the proposed arrangements and adopt Tornado Way as the ward boundary. This would better reflect existing community ties, provide a clear and easily understood boundary, and support effective and convenient local government representation.



Firthmoor:

We are pleased to see that the Commission has proposed retaining boundaries that are largely consistent with those of the former Eastbourne ward, with only a minor adjustment to the southern boundary along the Tees Valley railway line.

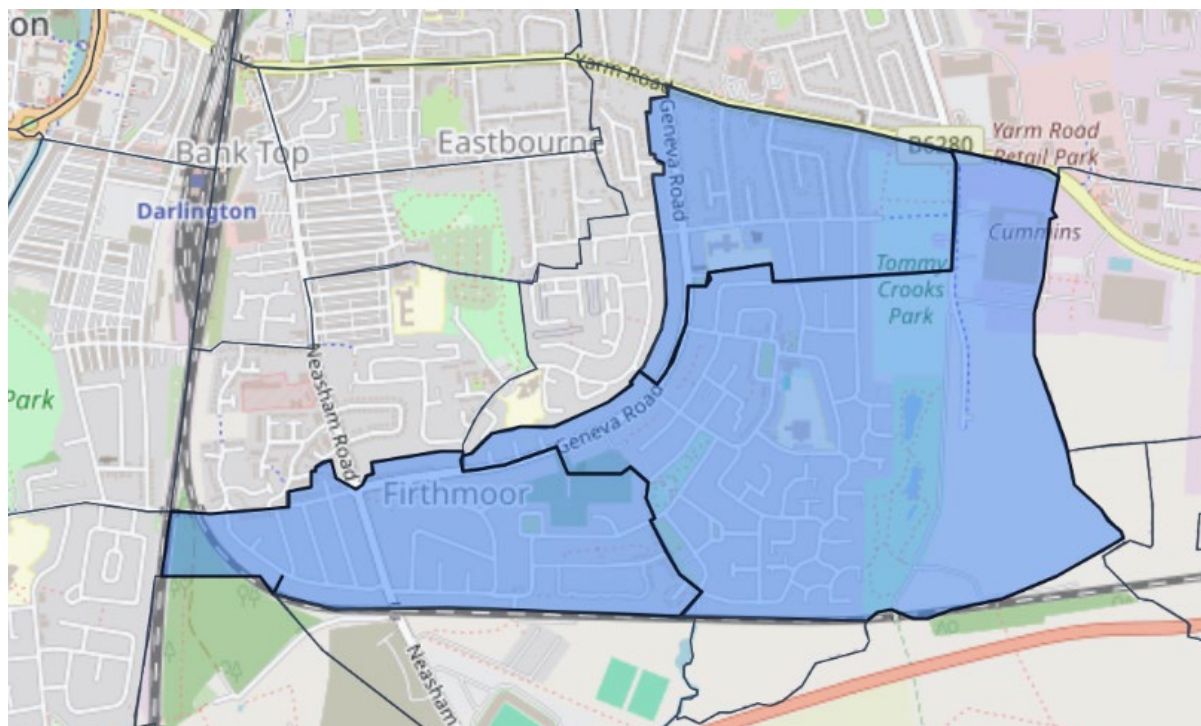
We believe the proposed Firthmoor ward reflects a clear and established community identity centred around a range of shared facilities, services and community assets. Residents across the area make use of facilities such as Firthmoor Community Centre, Maidendale Nature Reserve, Firthmoor Primary School, East Cemetery and Tommy Crooks Play Park. These amenities serve as important focal points for local residents and help reinforce a strong sense of place and community cohesion.

The area also benefits from a vibrant community spirit, demonstrated by local events such as Firthmoor Live and numerous other community activities held throughout the year. These events bring residents together and further strengthen the shared identity of the area.

We agree with the Commission's assessment that boundaries such as Geneva Road, Yarm Road and the Tees Valley railway line provide strong and easily recognisable physical boundaries that do not divide established communities. These features create clear ward boundaries that residents can readily understand and identify with.

We are particularly pleased that the properties located south of the railway line are proposed to be included within the Hurworth ward, ensuring that the entirety of Hurworth Meadows is represented within a single council ward rather than being divided between two. This change better reflects the reality of the community and will make it easier for residents to understand who represents them and how to engage with their elected councillors.

Overall, we believe the proposed arrangements successfully balance electoral equality with community identity and provide clear, logical boundaries that reflect established patterns of community life. We therefore support the Commission's draft proposals for this area.



Banktop & Lascelles

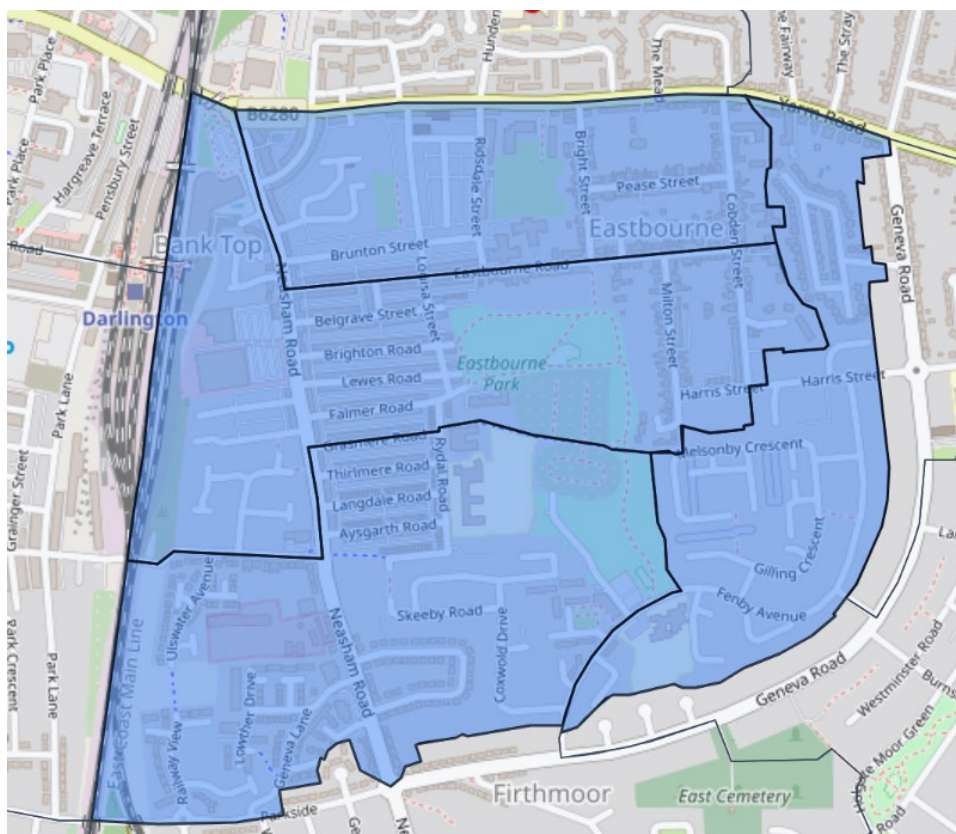
We are pleased to see that the Commission has proposed retaining the existing boundaries for the Bank Top and Lascelles ward. We believe the proposed arrangements successfully preserve established communities and reflect the strong and recognisable boundaries that separate Bank Top and Lascelles from neighbouring areas in the east of Darlington.

The existing ward benefits from a number of clear physical features that provide practical and easily understood boundaries. Yarm Road, Geneva Road and the East Coast Main Line all act as significant and recognisable features that help define the community and avoid the unnecessary division of established neighbourhoods.

Bank Top and Lascelles also share a strong sense of community identity through the facilities, amenities and public spaces used by residents across the ward. These include Eastbourne Park, The Rydal Academy and Fenby Avenue Play Park, all of which serve residents from throughout the area and contribute to a shared community focus.

In addition to these shared facilities, residents across Bank Top and Lascelles experience many of the same local issues and priorities. The communities are well connected and have developed longstanding social and community links that are reflected in the current ward arrangements.

We therefore believe the Commission's decision to leave the ward boundaries unchanged accurately reflects established community identities while also providing clear and effective electoral boundaries. We support the draft proposals and encourage the Commission to retain these arrangements in its final recommendations.



Springfield:

We are pleased to see that the Commission has proposed the creation of a new Springfield ward which, in our view, largely reflects existing community ties and incorporates many of the key amenities and services relied upon by local residents.

The proposed ward makes use of several strong and recognisable physical boundaries, including the East Coast Main Line, Whinfield Road, the River Skerne and Haughton Village. We agree that these features provide clear and logical boundaries that help define communities without unnecessarily dividing established neighbourhoods.

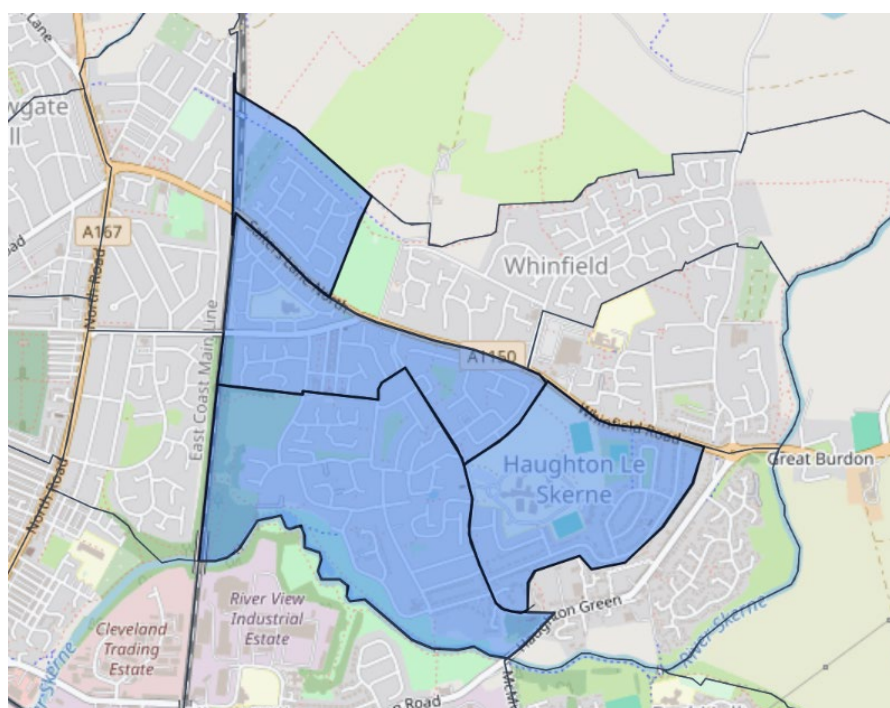
However, we would like to suggest one amendment to the proposed ward boundaries. We believe the Oakwood Drive estate, located to the west of Springfield Park, would be more appropriately included within the Springfield ward rather than the proposed Haughton and Whinfield ward.

While we agree that Whinfield Road forms a natural boundary between communities, we believe Springfield Park itself represents a much stronger physical barrier between the Oakwood Drive estate and Whinfield than Salters Lane North. Unlike Springfield Park, Salters Lane North is a relatively narrow road with accessible pedestrian crossing points that allow easy movement between neighbouring communities.

We also believe that residents of the Oakwood Drive estate have stronger day-to-day links with the proposed Springfield ward. Many residents rely upon facilities and services located within Springfield, including St Bede's Catholic Primary School, which is situated immediately adjacent to the estate. These shared facilities help reinforce community ties and contribute to a common local identity.

Including the Oakwood Drive estate within Springfield ward would therefore better reflect existing community connections while maintaining clear and recognisable boundaries. It would also ensure that residents who share facilities, services and community interests are represented within the same ward.

Overall, we support the Commission's proposal for the new Springfield ward and believe it represents a significant improvement in reflecting local communities. We would simply encourage the Commission to consider the inclusion of the Oakwood Drive estate within the ward as a refinement to further strengthen the alignment between ward boundaries and community identity.



Haughton & Whinfield:

We are pleased to see that the Commission has proposed a Haughton and Whinfield ward that broadly reflects existing community boundaries while also taking into account future housing development in the area.

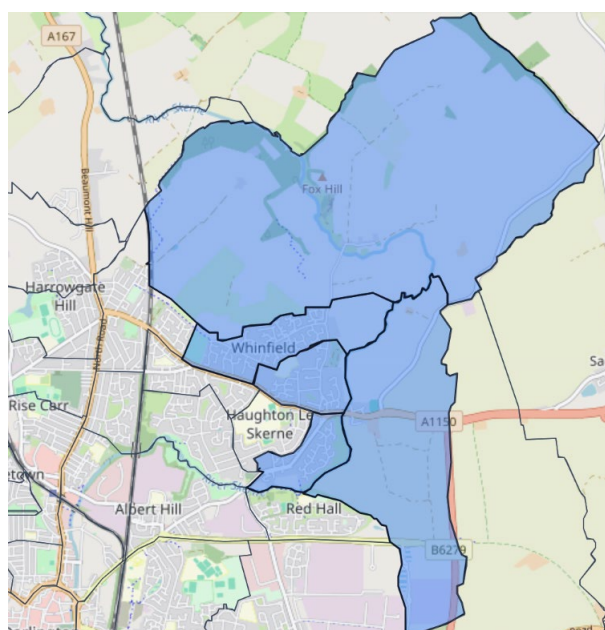
Haughton, currently within the Haughton and Springfield ward, possesses a distinct community identity centred around Haughton Village, its village green and the local services and amenities that serve residents. We believe Haughton has stronger community links with Whinfield than with Springfield. The two communities share important connections, including the Arriva 10 bus route, local services and access to green spaces along the River Skerne. These shared links create a natural community that is better reflected in the proposed Haughton and Whinfield ward.

We are also pleased that the Commission has accepted our recommendation to include the parish of Barmpton within the proposed Haughton and Whinfield ward. Given the scale of the proposed Skerningham development currently progressing through the planning process, this represents a sensible approach to future community identity. The development will be physically connected to Whinfield and the wider north-eastern part of Darlington, while having no direct road connection to Middleton St George, Sadberge or the other villages currently proposed to form part of that ward. As such, we believe the Commission's proposal better reflects both existing and future patterns of community interaction.

However, we would encourage the Commission to reconsider one aspect of the proposed boundary. As outlined in our comments on the Springfield ward, we believe the Oakwood Drive estate to the west of Springfield Park would be more appropriately included within the proposed Springfield ward rather than Haughton and Whinfield.

While we recognise the Commission's use of Salters Lane North as a boundary, we believe Springfield Park represents a much stronger and more recognisable physical barrier between communities. Residents of the Oakwood Drive estate have closer day-to-day links with neighbouring communities within the proposed Springfield ward, including the Kingsway area, and make use of many of the same local facilities and services.

We therefore support the overall proposal for the Haughton and Whinfield ward, particularly the inclusion of Barmpton, while respectfully asking the Commission to consider transferring the Oakwood Drive estate into the proposed Springfield ward in order to better reflect community identity and physical boundaries



North Road:

While the proposed boundaries differ in some respects from those we submitted during the initial consultation, we are pleased to see that the Commission's draft recommendations better reflect existing community ties and, in several cases, unite communities that were previously divided between multiple wards.

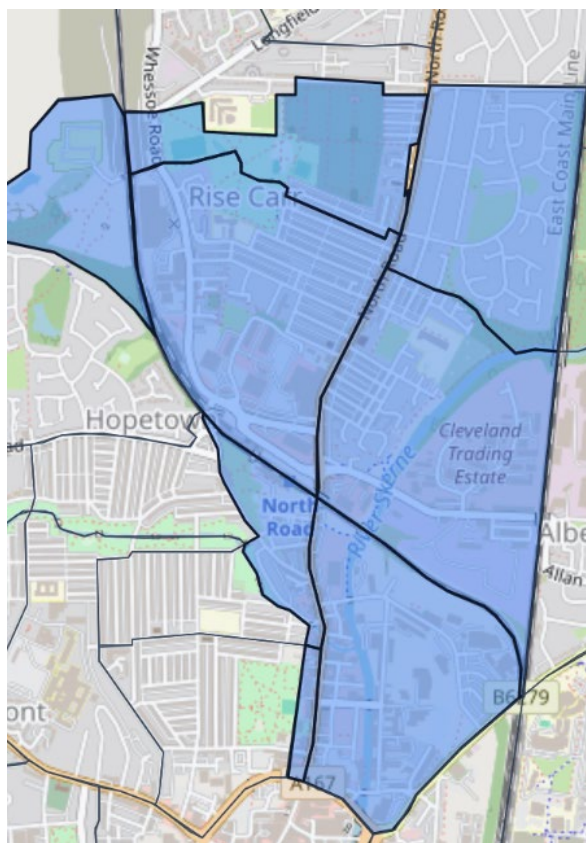
In particular, we welcome the Commission's decision to include the area between North Park and Longfield Road within the proposed Harrowgate Hill ward. During the first consultation, we highlighted concerns that the Longfield community was divided between Harrowgate Hill and North Road. We believe the proposed arrangement provides a more coherent boundary and better reflects the identity of the wider Longfield area.

Having reviewed the Commission's report, we also agree with the proposal to include the southern parts of North Road within the North Road ward. These areas have strong social, historical and geographical links to the rest of the ward and their inclusion will help ensure that established communities remain together.

We further support the proposal to include Honey Pot Lane Caravan Park within the North Road ward. The site is accessed solely via North Road and has no direct physical connection to any part of the proposed Faverdale ward. Including it within North Road therefore reflects both practical accessibility and existing community links, while creating a more logical and understandable ward boundary.

Overall, we believe the Commission's proposals for this part of Darlington represent an improvement on the current arrangements. The draft recommendations make better use of recognisable boundaries, strengthen community cohesion and help ensure that residents who share common interests and local facilities are represented within the same ward.

We therefore support the Commission's proposals for the North Road area and encourage its retention in the final recommendations.



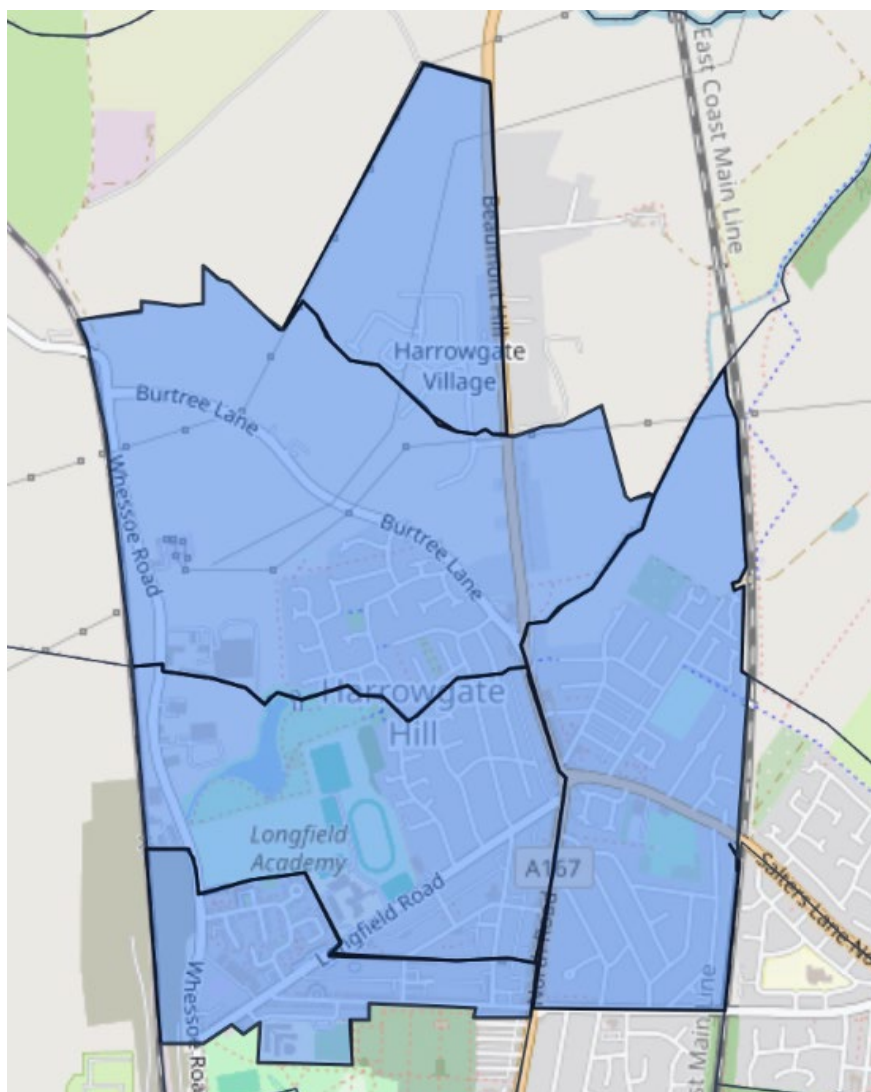
Harrowgate Hill:

We are pleased to see that the Commission has proposed arrangements which better reflect the existing community boundaries within the Harrowgate Hill area.

As previously stated, we welcome the inclusion of our proposal to transfer parts of the Longfield area between North Park and Longfield Road into the Harrowgate Hill ward, rather than continuing to divide the Longfield community between two separate wards. We believe this change will result in a more coherent and clearly defined ward boundary that better reflects established community ties.

North Park provides a strong and recognisable physical barrier between North Road and the Longfield area. In our view, this feature forms a more appropriate and meaningful boundary than the previous arrangements, and helps ensure that ward boundaries align more closely with how local communities are experienced on the ground.

Overall, we believe the proposed changes represent an improvement on the existing arrangements and provide a clearer reflection of local community identity and structure. We therefore support the Commission's approach for this area.



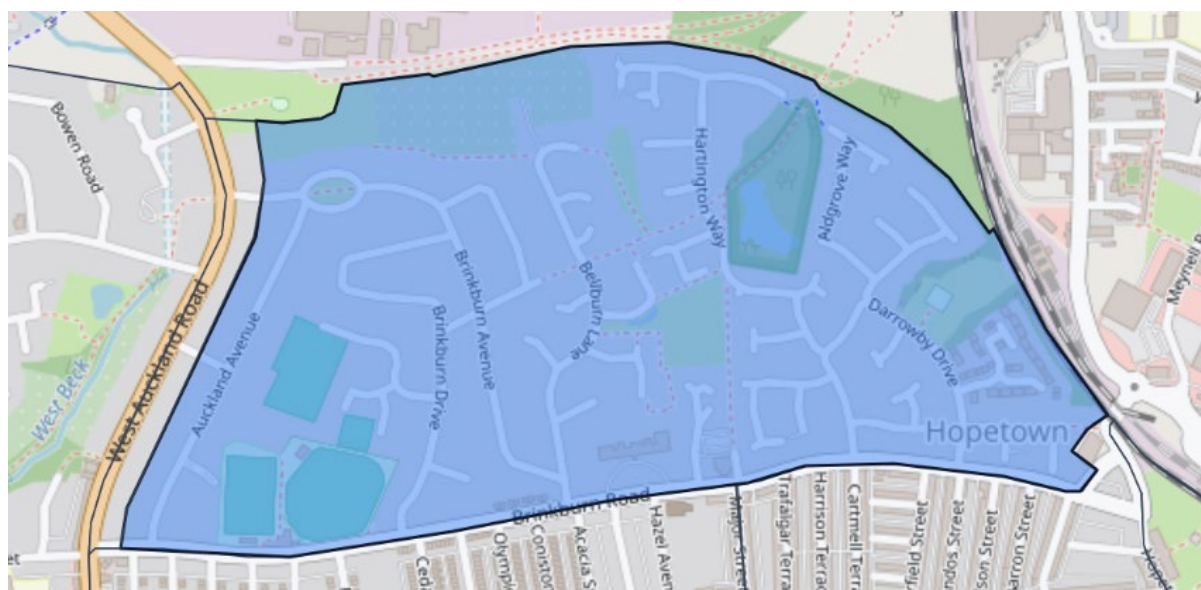
Brinkburn Ward:

While the proposed boundaries for Brinkburn differ from those we submitted in the first consultation, we are pleased to see that Brinkburn is included within a ward separate from Faverdale and West Park, with which it shares limited physical connections and few identifiable community ties.

The proposed arrangements help to retain Brinkburn as a coherent community within a single ward. We believe this is a positive outcome, as it ensures the area is not divided between multiple wards and allows for more focused local representation. In our view, where a community has a clear identity, it is preferable for it to be represented within a ward structure that enables councillors to maintain a clear focus on its specific needs and priorities, rather than being stretched across several distinct communities.

We would also note that this principle of maintaining coherent communities within a single ward is consistent with points we have raised elsewhere in our submission, particularly in relation to Albert Hill and Red Hall. We believe the same approach should be applied consistently where strong community identities exist.

Overall, we support the proposed approach for Brinkburn and consider it an improvement on arrangements that might otherwise have divided the community across wider, less clearly defined ward boundaries.



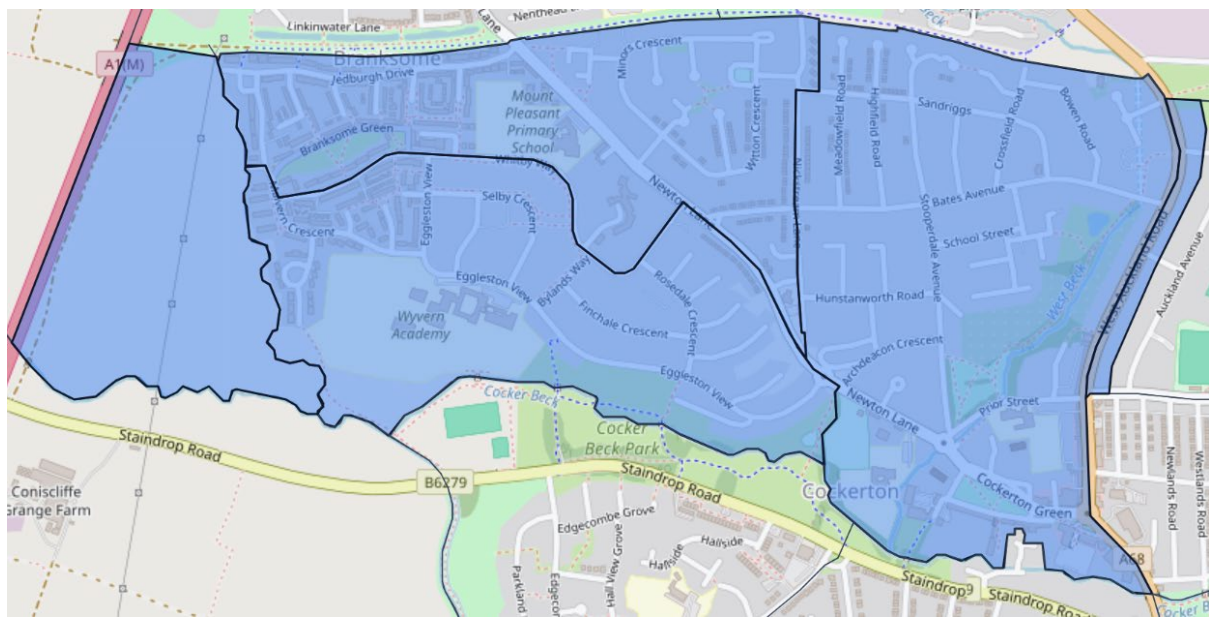
Cockerton & Branksome

After reviewing the Commission's report and draft proposals for the Cockerton and Branksome ward, we understand and broadly support the reasoning behind the proposed arrangements, which largely retain the existing boundaries of the current Cockerton ward while making a small number of sensible adjustments.

In particular, we agree with the proposal to include the eastern side of West Auckland Road within the Cockerton ward. This change more accurately reflects the reality of the local community and avoids dividing a cohesive neighbourhood along a major road that runs through the centre of the area. We believe this amendment will result in boundaries that are more intuitive for residents and better aligned with established community ties.

We also support the proposal to extend the ward boundary westwards to include the land between Branksome and the A1(M). This approach not only provides a clearer and more recognisable boundary between Cockerton and Branksome and the neighbouring Heighington and High Coniscliffe ward, but also takes into account the possibility of future development in this area. Using the A1(M) as a boundary creates a logical and enduring ward edge that is easy for residents to understand and identify.

Overall, we believe the Commission's proposals for Cockerton and Branksome strike an appropriate balance between community identity, effective local government and the use of clear physical boundaries. We therefore support the draft recommendations and encourage the Commission to retain them in its final proposals.



Faverdale:

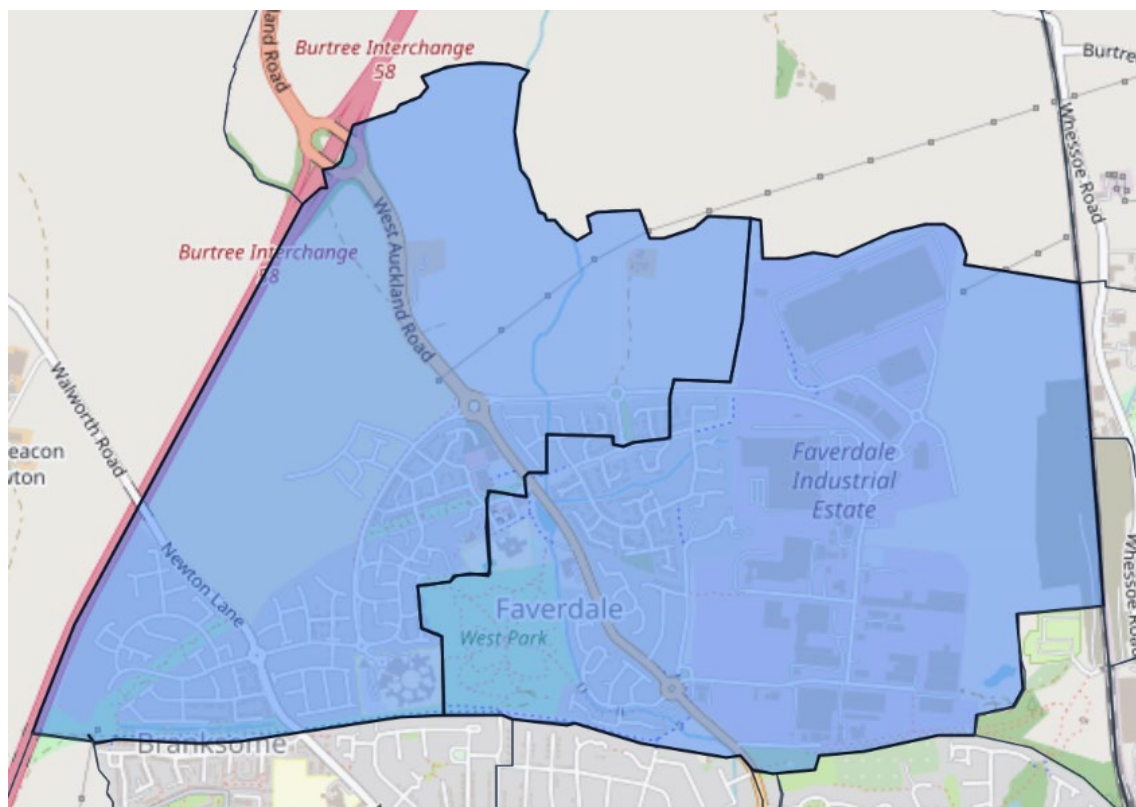
We are pleased to see that the Commission has proposed boundaries for Faverdale which better reflect existing community identities and recognise the significant growth that has taken place in this part of Darlington in recent years.

Given the substantial housing development that has already occurred in West Park, together with the further growth planned for the area, we believe it is appropriate that Faverdale is separated from the current Brinkburn and Faverdale ward. As we stated in our original submission, there are limited physical and community connections between Brinkburn and Faverdale. The two areas are linked by only a single road connection and share few facilities, services or community assets. As a result, we do not believe they form a coherent electoral community.

We also support the Commission's decision to use the former railway line as the boundary between Faverdale and the communities to the south, including Cockerton and Brinkburn. The former railway corridor provides a clear and recognisable physical barrier that reflects existing community boundaries and creates an easily understood ward structure. We believe this is a more appropriate boundary than alternatives that would divide established neighbourhoods or combine communities with limited day-to-day interaction.

In addition, we are pleased that the Commission has accepted our proposal to include Archdeacon Newton within the Heighington and High Coniscliffe ward. Archdeacon Newton has stronger links with the surrounding rural communities than with the urban areas of Faverdale and West Park. Its inclusion within a ward focused on rural villages and countryside communities therefore better reflects both its character and its existing community connections.

Overall, we believe the Commission's proposals for Faverdale represent a significant improvement in reflecting community identity, accommodating future growth and creating clear and recognisable boundaries. We therefore support the draft recommendations and encourage the Commission to retain them in its final proposals.

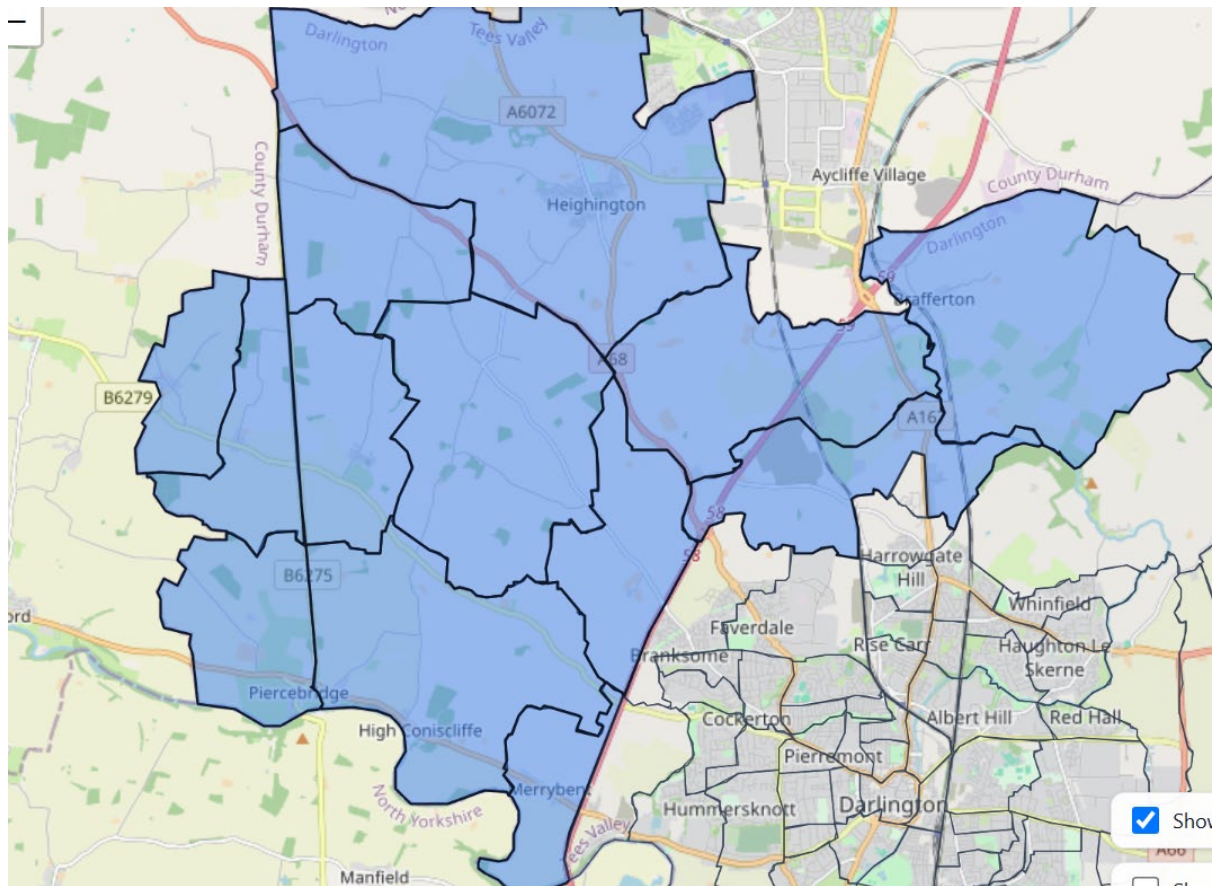


Heighington & High Coniscliffe

We are pleased to see that the Boundary Commission's proposals for Heighington and High Coniscliffe retain all of the rural communities within the existing ward and include Archdeacon Newton, which we believe is more appropriately represented within a rural ward such as Heighington and High Coniscliffe rather than an urban ward such as Faverdale.

We consider that the proposed boundaries better reflect existing community identities and strengthen the coherence of rural communities in the west of Darlington. These areas share similar characteristics, local priorities and patterns of community life, and are therefore best represented within a single ward structure.

Overall, we support the Commission's proposals for this area as they provide a clearer and more appropriate reflection of established rural community ties.



Summary:

To summarise our overall response to the Boundary Commission's draft proposals, following extensive consultation with local residents and elected representatives, we are broadly supportive of many of the proposed ward boundaries across the borough, particularly those relating to the three rural wards. However, there are several areas where we believe revisions should be strongly considered to better reflect established community identities and local ties.

Firstly, we believe that the suburban area of Blackwell has not been adequately reflected in the proposed arrangements. As a distinct suburb of Darlington, Blackwell would be more appropriately grouped with other western suburban communities such as Hummersknott, with which it shares a range of facilities, services and community spaces.

Secondly, we believe that Darlington town centre would benefit from being placed within a more focused and appropriately sized ward, ensuring more accountable and effective local representation. We consider it would be better paired with surrounding areas such as Abbey Road and Southend Avenue, where residents face similar issues including parking pressures, traffic congestion and the impacts of peak shopping and school hours.

Thirdly, we believe that Pierremont Crescent, Pierremont Gardens and Woodlands Terrace would be more appropriately included within the Pierremont ward, reflecting stronger community links and shared access to local amenities and facilities.

Fourthly, we consider that the Oakwood Drive estate would be better placed within the Springfield ward, given its closer connections to nearby communities such as the Kingsway estate and the presence of stronger physical barriers separating it from areas in the proposed Whinfield ward.

Finally, we believe that Albert Hill and Red Hall, and Hundens Lane and Lingfield, should be represented as separate wards. We consider that there is a strong physical separation between these areas and that they have distinct community identities, facilities and local service needs that would be better reflected through separate warding arrangements.

Overall, while we support a significant proportion of the Commission's proposals, we respectfully encourage the Commission to consider the above amendments in order to better reflect community identity, improve clarity of boundaries and ensure effective and convenient local government representation.